



Testimony of
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Meriden Federation of Teachers, Local #1478

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 15, 2010

**H.B. 5491 An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms
to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut**

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman and members of the Education Committee. I am David Sharron, Vice President for Professional Issues for the Meriden Federation of Teachers. Thank you for letting me have the opportunity to speak before you.

Currently, I am a computer teacher at Washington Middle School in Meriden. I have taught for a total of 18 years. For the first twelve years, I taught eighth grade math including Algebra I. In addition, I serve on the District Improvement Committee. We work closely with Pat Proctor and the State to establish a District plan that, among other things, addresses achievement gaps on our CMT tests.

(I know that prior to me) AFT Connecticut President Sharon Palmer addressed H.B. 5491 *An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut* but I wanted to address my remarks specifically to Section 2, which deals with establishing a tax reimbursement pilot program for teachers in priority districts.

Section 2 has an interesting twist to funding education; income tax breaks for teachers who teach extra after school and on Saturdays. I did not go into teaching for the money. With my math and computer skills, I am sure that I could have found a job that paid more when I started. I chose teaching because I love teaching. I am sure that I am not alone. Teachers across this state have a passion for education and a passion for working with students. What teachers want is for students to be successful. In order for that to happen, we don't need tax breaks.

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What teachers need is a voice in how reform is developed and executed. As I said, I am part of our District Improvement Committee. Last year, Meriden developed many strategies to address gaps in achievement. We have curriculum initiatives, instructional initiatives, professional development initiatives, leveling initiatives and even infrastructure initiatives. We have developed a series of goals to close existing differences in achievement. As you are aware, the State is in the middle of CMT testing. This will be the first year that Meriden will be able to assess the success of all of our hard work. HB 5491 proposes additional, un-tested initiatives even before we have a measure of what we have achieved.

Teachers need the tools so that their students can reach their highest academic potential. Teachers need respect from their employers and a stable work environment to teach in. They need critical resources that make student achievement possible; such as, mentoring for new and experienced teachers, as well as effective and relevant professional development. Several years ago, Meriden discontinued its individualized professional development plan. Because of budgetary concerns, we now do mass professional development, a one-size-fits-all program that is just not appropriate for everyone. The proposed tax breaks of HB 5491 do not pay for valuable teacher training as part of a comprehensive plan to help students

Teachers want to be a part of the solution but this bill does not do that. It doesn't take advantage of the expertise in the classroom. The achievement gap will truly be closed when teachers, administrators, superintendents, and parents can speak openly, honestly and collaboratively about the unique needs of schools and tailor those needs to that school.

I urge you to reject H.B. 5491. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions I would be happy to answer them.